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The CIA and newsmen

Adm. Stansfield Turner registered surprise last week when members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors responded negatively to his admission that he had approved of three instances in which the Central Intelligence Agency used journalists for secret intelligence operations.

Turner was quoted in a New York Times article as saying, "I don't understand why you think if you accept an assignment from me that you are no longer free."

We are surprised at Admiral Turner's surprise and at his naivety.

The point, admiral, is not that a journalist is surrendering his freedom by working as an intelligence agent. It is that any journalist who permits such misuse of his profession is placing the entire profession in the category of untrustworthy.

When an American journalist, or any other for that matter, is not trusted he cannot gain access to information freely. Any legitimate newsgathering operation could be viewed with suspicion because of the covert activity of a few in the profession.

True, in some hostile nations such as Iran and the Soviet Union, American newsmen are viewed with suspicion. And, in those nations, newsgathering is difficult.

It is important to the world that news of all nations be transmitted and exchanged freely and credibly. Otherwise, propaganda will flourish.

Newsmen must remain credible and apart from any intelligence operations. Not only does such covert activity by journalists hamper news gathering abroad it creates doubts among readers at home.